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SOCIAL INTERACTION IN COMMUNITY PARKS IN KARKH, IRAQ

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SOCIAL INTERACTION IN COMMUNITY PARKS IN KARKH, IRAQ

By

SARAH ABDUL-KAREEM SALIH

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

October 2017

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

SOCIAL INTERACTION IN COMMUNITY PARKS IN KARKH, IRAQ

By

SARAH ABDUL-KAREEM SALIH

October 2017

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Since the war in 2003 Baghdad has suffered different levels of political, administration, economic ethnic, sectarian, etc. that led to loss of lives, social capital, destruction of Iraqi infrastructure and important buildings, increased crisis aggravation between different ethnics, as well as disappearance and destruction of many Baghdad's open spaces and recreational places. This has substantially lowered living quality, destroyed social interaction and led to failure in providing a circumference suitable for life. Thus, Baghdad citizens are looking for alternatives for entertainment, amenities, relaxation, and social interaction (coexistence), e.g. travelling or migrate to different cities or countries, extreme social media usage or the emergence of some inappropriate sociocultural behaviours.

This research addresses the issue of lack of amenities (recreational activities) and open spaces, which have led to decrease and disappearance of social interaction among residents in Baghdad city. So this study aimed to understand factors affecting social interaction in the *Karkh* community of Baghdad, identify the criteria of recreational open spaces for promoting social interaction there, and enhance the role of community park construction for sound social interaction in *Karkh*, Baghdad. This study employed quantitative method, in the form of survey, for data collection. Data was obtained from questionnaires to assess the population attitudes towards the social interaction range in *Karkh* district of Baghdad city, through the selection of 270 respondents in a single-stage random procedure from ten specific neighborhoods in *Karkh* district.

The study findings provided validity of research hypotheses on the importance of community parks in enhancing social interaction by implementing appropriate criteria and components in parks. Results also confirmed that one of the main means to promote social interaction was to make more efforts from authorities responsible for maintenance, construction, rehabilitation, and administration of open spaces and parks in Baghdad.

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The results of this study are useful reference for urban and landscape planners, architects, social psychologists, the Municipality of Baghdad, and researchers in this field.

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INTERAKSI SOSIAL DI TAMAN KOMUNITI DI KARKH, IRAQ

Oleh

SARAH ABDUL-KAREEM SALIH

Oktober 2017

Pengerusi: Sumarni Ismail, PhD
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Sejak peperang tahun 2003, Baghdad terjejas dalam pelbagai aspek termasuk; politik, pentadbiran, ekonomi etnik, mazhab dan sebagainya. Ianya juga telah memberikan kesan kepada bukan sahaja kepada kehilangan nyawa, modal sosial, kemusnahan infrastruktur malah bangunan-bangunan penting Iraq. Peperanagn juga memberikan kesan terhadap peningkatan gangguan krisis antara etnik serta kehilangan dan kemusnahan kawasan lapang dan tempat rekreasi di Baghdad. Keadaan ini jelas menjejaskan kualiti hidup, kemusnahkan interaksi sosial, dan membawa kepada kegagalan menyediakan persekitaran yang sesuai untuk kehidupan seharian. Oleh itu rakyat Baghdad mencari alternatif lain sebagai hiburan antaranya; kemudahan istirehat dan interaksi sosial (hidup bersama), contohnya mengembara atau berpindah ke bandar atau negara lain. Selain itu, penggunaan media sosial secara ekstrim menyebabkan kemunculan tingkah laku budaya sosial yang tidak wajar.

Kajian ini meneliti isu berkaitan kurangnya kemudahan (aktiviti rekreasi) dan kawasan lapang yang membawa kepada kekurangan dan kehilangan interaksi sosial dalam kalangan penduduk di bandar Baghdad. Kajian ini bertujuan memahami faktor-faktor yang menjejaskan interaksi sosial dalam komuniti di Karkh di Baghdad, menentukan ciri-ciri kawasan lapang untuk tujuan rekreasi bagi mempromosi interaksi sosial di sini. Ianya juga bagi meningkatkan peranan pembinaan taman komuniti untuk interaksi sosial yang sihat di kalangan penduduk Karkh, Baghdad. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif; kaji selidik bagi pengumpulan data. Data diperolehi daripada soal selidik untuk menilai sikap penduduk terhadap julat interaksi sosial di daerah Karkh, Baghdad. Respondan adalah melalui pemilihan 270 daripada sepuluh kejiranan terpilih di daerah Karkh.

Dapatan kajian mengesahkan hipotesis kajian tentang kepentingan taman komuniti dalam meningkatkan interaksi sosial dengan melaksanakan ciri-ciri dan komponen yang sesuai dalam taman komuniti. Dapatan kajian juga mengesahkan salah satu cara utama

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untuk mempromosi interaksi sosial adalah dengan melaksanakan lebih banyak usaha daripada pihak berkuasa yang bertanggungjawab untuk penyelenggaraan, pembinaan, pemulihan dan pengurusan kawasan lapang dan taman-taman di Baghdad. Dapatan kajian ini merupakan rujukan yang berguna kepada perancang bandar dan lanskap, arkitek, ahli psikologi sosial, Majlis Perbandaran Baghdad, dan para penyelidik dalam bidang ini pada amnya.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 5 October 2017 to conduct the final examination of Sarah Abdulkareem Salih Salih on his thesis entitled "Social Interaction in Community Parks in Karkh, Iraq" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
ABSTRACT		i
ABSTRAK		iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		v
APPROVAL		vi
DECLARATION		viii
LIST OF TABLES		xii
LIST OF FIGURES		xiv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS		xv
CHAPTER		
1 INTRODUCTION		
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Social Interaction as a Global Issue, and Public Spaces	1
1.3	Historical Review of *Karkh*, Baghdad	3
1.3.1	Baghdad in Abbasid Dynasty (750 - 1258 AD)	3
1.3.2	Baghdad in Twentieth Century	4
1.3.2.1	*Zawraa* Park, Baghdad	6
1.4	Statement of the Problem	7
1.5	Research Questions	7
1.6	Research Objectives	8
1.7	Research Hypothesis	8
1.8	Research Structure	8
1.9	Scope and Limitation of the Study	10
1.10	Summary	10
2 LITERATURE REVIEW		
2.1	Introduction	11
2.2	Social Interaction	11
2.2.1	Factors Affecting Social Interaction in OS	11
2.2.2	Social Network and Social Interaction	15
2.2.2.1	Pros & Cons of Social Network	15
2.3	Open Space, Landscape and Park	17
2.3.1	Benefits and Importance of the Park	17
2.3.2	Factors Affecting Parks in General	19
2.3.3	Open Spaces Types	19
2.4	Social Life, Recreation and landscape in Baghdad	21
2.4.1	The Formation of Iraqi society	21
2.4.2	Open Space and Recreation in Baghdad	22
2.5	Case References of the Study	25
2.5.1	United Kingdom and United State	25
2.5.2	Malaysia	27
2.5.3	*Zawraa* Park from Iraq	28
2.6	Summary	29

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3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
3.1 Introduction 31
3.2 Research Design 31
3.2.1 Survey Study: Questionnaires 34
3.2.2 The Area of Study 35
3.2.3 Population and Sample Selection 37
3.3 Data Collection and Instrumentation 38
3.3.1 Variables of the Study 39
3.3.2 Validity and Reliability of the Instrumentation 40
3.4 Analysis process 41

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS
4.1 Introduction 43
4.2 Sample Characteristics 43
4.3 Dependent Variable Analysis: Respondents Activities 46
4.3.1 Individual's Social and Recreational Activities 46
4.3.2 Availability of Leisure Activities and Parks 52
4.4 Mediator Variable Analysis 56
4.5 Independent Variable Analysis: Community Park 61
4.5.1 Factors affecting parks efficiency in Baghdad 61
4.5.2 Criteria of Open Spaces and Parks 65
4.5.3 Characteristics and Components of the CP 68

5 FINDINGS' DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
5.1 Introduction 77
5.2 Findings of the Study 77
5.2.1 Dependent Variable: Respondents Activities 77
5.2.2 Mediator Variable: Social Technological Activities 78
5.2.3 Independent Variable: Community Parks 79
5.2.4 Needs to Achieve CP for Social Interaction 81
5.3 Research Conclusion 85
5.4 Recommendation for the Future Research 86
5.5 Benefits and Knowledge Contributions of the Study 86

BIBLIOGRAPHY 87
APPENDICES 92
BIODATA OF STUDENT 104
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS 105

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LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
3.1	Research Design: Objectives, Questions and Variables	32
3.2	Formulation of Questionnaires Derive from the Variables	39
3.3	Correlation Coefficient of Test-retest Reliability	41
3.4	Process of Data Collection and Data Analysis	42
4.1.1	Sample Characteristics: Gender of Samples	43
4.1.2	Sample Characteristics: Age of Samples	44
4.1.3	Sample Characteristics: Accommodation	44
4.1.4	Sample Characteristics: Income Level	44
4.1.5	Sample Income Level According to Accommodation	45
4.1.6	Sample Characteristics: Occupation	45
4.2.1	Descriptive Statistic: Sample Recreational Activities	46
4.2.2	Descriptive Statistic: Social Recreational Place of Respondents	47
4.2.3	Frequency: Sample Recreational Activities	48
4.2.4	Frequency: Social Recreational Place of Respondents	48
4.2.5	Correlation: Social Recreational Activities and Sample Characteristics	50
4.3.1	Statistic: Availability of Leisure Activity and Parks	52
4.3.2	Frequency: Availability of Leisure Activity and Parks	52
4.3.3	Correlation: Leisure Activity and Parks and Sample Characteristics	55
4.4.1	Descriptive Statistic: Respondents' Daily Activity on Social Networking Sites	57
4.4.2	Frequency: Respondents' Daily Activity on Social Networking Sites	57
4.4.3	Descriptive Statistic: Average H/D of Respondents on Technological Entertainment Means	58
4.4.4	Frequency: Average H/D of Respondents on Technological Entertainment Means	58
4.4.5	Correlation: Average H/D of Respondents Spend on Technological Entertainment Means and Sample Characteristics	60
4.5.1	Statistic: Factors that Affecting on *Zawraa* Park Visitors	61
4.5.2	Frequency: Factors that Affecting on *Zawraa* Park Visitors	62
4.5.3	Correlation: Factors of *Zawraa* Park and Sample Characteristics	64
4.5.4	Statistic: Criteria of Open Spaces and Parks	65
4.5.5	Frequency: Criteria of Open Spaces and Parks	65
4.5.6	Correlation: Criteria of Open Spaces and Sample Characteristics	67
4.5.7	Descriptive Statistic: Characteristics of Community Park	69
4.5.8	Frequency: Characteristics of Community Park	70

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4.5.9	Correlation: Characteristics of Community Park and Sample Characteristics	73
4.5.10	Descriptive Statistic: Elements of Community Park	74
4.5.11	Frequency: Elements of Community Park	47
4.5.12	Correlation: Elements of Community Park and Sample Characteristics	75
5.1	Summary and Finding of the Research	84

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1.1	The Benefits of Public Spaces	3
1.2	The Round City of Baghdad in the 10th Century	4
1.3	Narrow Zigzag Paths and *Shanashel*, Baghdad 1920 AD	5
1.4	*Zawraa* Park after 2003 AD	6
1.5	Research Structure	9
2.1	Player interaction patterns	12
2.2	Social Interaction Criteria according to LR	14
2.3	Environments and Human Well-being	18
2.4	Open Spaces and Parks Formulation according to LR	20
2.5	Drawing shows Baghdad City in Abbasid Era	23
2.6	Neglected Park in *Karkh*, Baghdad, 2012	24
2.7	*Abu Nuwas* Park in Baghdad, 2010	24
2.8	Research Method of United kingdom Case Reference	26
2.9	Research Method of Malaysian Case Reference	27
2.10	Research Method of Local (*Zawraa* Park) Case Reference	28
2.11	Theoretical Framework of the Study (according to LR)	30
3.1	Research Methodology Structure (Quantitative Survey)	33
3.2	Survey Research Design	34
3.3	*Karkh* District Map	35
3.4	Area of Study; Neighborhoods of *Karkh* District, Baghdad	36
3.5	Process of Sample Selecting from the Population of *Karkh*	38
4.1	Percentage of number of times of doing social recreational activity	51
4.2	Percentage of the place of doing some social recreational activity	51
4.3	Percentage of the leisure activities and recreational parks	54
4.4	Respondents' Preferences about Park Elements	76
4.5	Respondents' percentages of (strongly agree) value on community park characteristics	76
5.1	Results of Relationship between Variables	81
5.2	Means to Achieve Social Interaction in Community Park	82
5.3	Community Park Structure for Social Interaction	85

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GAL	Good access and linkage
SOC	Sociability
UAC	User and activity
DCI	Degree of Comfort and Image
AOC	Ataturk Forest Farm and Zoo in Ankara, Turkey
LR	Literature Review
PA	Physical activity
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
IV	Independent Variable
DV	Dependent Variable
MV	Mediator Variable
CP	Community Park

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a simplified definition of global ideas of social interaction, Baghdad city in general, especially *Karkh* district, and it particularly focuses on social entertainment and open spaces since the foundation of Baghdad until today. The chapter then highlights research problem, questions, objectives, and hypothesis. It will also explains the research framework, scope, and limitation. Since all religions, especially Islam, urge on human coexistence and communication among various races, there are many Quran verses which mention social peaceful coexistence:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوباً وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ(13)

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted" (Verse: 13, Surah: 49 Al-Hujurat).

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالِمِينَ(22)

"And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge" (Verse: 22, Surah 30: Ar-Rum).

1.2 Social Interaction as a Global Issue, and Public Spaces

Public space allow people to meet on ostensibly neutral grounds in planned and unplanned ways, to interact with others within the context of the whole community, so public spaces can contribute to the cohesion of communities, while social relationships vary according to the age, gender and place, where place element is a key factor to determine the nature of social activity for all ages (Holland et al., 2007). They highlighted the factors affecting social interaction in public spaces that including; spaces design, maintenance, management, safety and security. Therefore, according to this study physical space is an essential to achieve social interaction, so place and its elements could be a key factor to solve social interaction issues.

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(Scheinkman, 2008) stated that social interaction is an exchange between two or more individuals and is a building block of society, and it refers to particular forms of externalities in which the actions of a reference group affect an individual's preferences. The reference group depends on an individual's family, neighbors, friends or peers in the context of a space. While, (Huang and Deng, 2008) argued that social behaviors are deeply localized and historical on the account of cultural background. They highlighted that growth and development of information and communication technology, relationships, communities and cultures have been dramatically affected nowadays. Where people incorporate these emerging technologies into their social interactions, there results a tendency to lose touch with social nuances, cultural values, and the characteristics of traditional society. However, this study only focused on the impact of development and growth on socio cultural behaviors. They also mentioned that cultural activities performs a social function by creating cohesiveness in families and by offering a habitual practice that can be passed on from one generation to another.

On the other hand (Bekker et al., 2010) describe that activities in the space are basic to create a social communication in that space. This study highlighted some design values that apply for designing playful interactions for social interaction and physical play. However this study only focused on the importance of activity in the open space to achieve social interaction. This study also mentioned that players in recreational zone can create a range of physical games and activities which in turn increase the interaction and social relations among them. While, (Barkan, 2013) stated that the environment and nature is very much a sociological topic for some reasons like environmental problems have a significant impact on people, as do the many other social problems. Solutions to our environmental problems also require changes in social and political factors, as well as many environmental problems reflect and illustrate social inequality based on social class and on race and ethnicity.

(Larson et al., 2014) stated that activities in open spaces could improve health and social behaviors. They highlighted the relationship among open spaces, social relationships and health promotion. However this study focused mainly on the health promotion according to physical activities in Georgia. They mentioned that should strengthen the efforts to promote physical activities via outdoor recreation. While (Florido, 2016) stated that although the proliferation of technologies that are able to overcome the obstacles of time and space that could help to maintain and strengthen familial relationships, communicate effectively with others, however, some technological advances cause people to be distracted, overly stressed, increasingly isolated and reduces well-being. This study highlighted some negative impacts of present life and technologies on social interaction in general, where technology and present life has had a profound impact on what it means to be social. However this study basically focused on the social relationships over technological means. This study also mentioned that many people are involved in an abundant number of relationships through technology, but sometimes the quantity of these associations leaves people feeling qualitatively empty.

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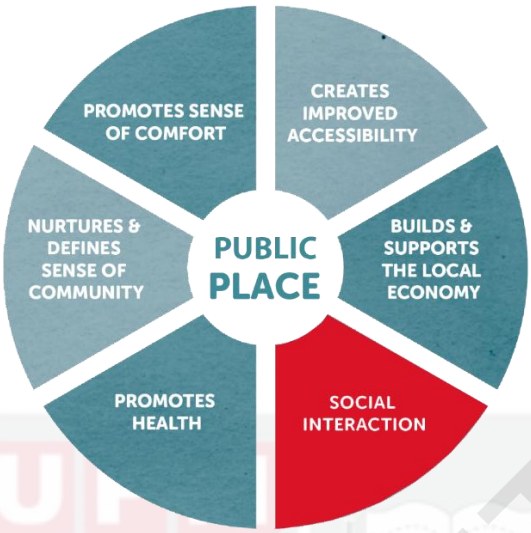

Figure 1.1: The Benefits of Public Spaces
(Source: pps.org)

1.3 Historical Review of *Karkh*, Baghdad

Baghdad is the capital of Iraq and largest city in Iraq with a population of 7,216,040 (Tore, 2008). Located along Tigris river, which runs through centre Baghdad and divides it into two parts: *Karkh* (the western shore of the Tigris) and *Rusafa*. Population of *Karkh*, according to the Ministry of Planning estimation, is 4,100,344 in 2009 (Tore, 2008). *Karkh* consists of fourteen neighborhoods: *Mansour*, *Amiriyah*, *Ghazaliya*, Saidiya, *Abu Dshir*, *Doura*, *Bayaa*, *Shulah*, *Jihad*, *Kadhimiya*, *Haifa* St., *Washash*, *Adeel*, and the Green Zone.

1.3.1 Baghdad in Abbasid Dynasty (750 _ 1258 AD)

Rounded city (Baghdad) was built by Caliph Abu Ja'far Al-Mansur in 762 AD on the western shore of Tigris river (*Karkh*), in a circular shape of diameter 2638 meter, as a new phenomenon in Islamic architecture. Baghdad consisted of seven elements; mosque and school, caliph palace, landscape, surrounding walls, gates, and residential areas. The mosque was one of the most important elements in the city, the first building built to get education, and gather people of different ages. Mosques' courtyard was large, open to sky, with green space and often contained a fountain where people meet and interact. Many schools also appeared during the Abbasid era, to teach different sciences. They contained a bookstore, mosque, food court, and outdoor landscape e.g. *Mustansiriya*[1] and *Bayt Al-Hikma*[2].

[1]*Mustansiriya* School: one of the oldest school in the world, was established in 1227 AD, by the Abbasid Caliph *Al-Mustansir*. Its architecture was distinctive (courtyard building), with Islamic inscriptions.

[2]*Bayt Al-Hikma* /House of Wisdom: was a major intellectual center during the Islamic Golden Age, founded by Caliph *Harun al-Rashid* 809 AD, many Muslim, Jewish and Christian scholars studied there.

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Rounded city of Baghdad was characterized by a distinctive and special urban fabric, where most of the buildings were courtyards with high privacy. The love of gardens during the Abbasid period, whether in Baghdad or in Samarra, was born within the already existing cultural tradition of Mesopotamia (Al-Samarrai, 2002). The Abbasids were also interested in establishing of zoos, before other communities, and they collected different animals from different regions. Abbasid was also the oldest for using *al-Shanashel* and *Mashrabiya* in the buildings windows (Al-Shorbagy, 2010).

Figure 1.2: The Rounded City of Baghdad in the 10th Century
(Source: amusingplanet.com)

1.3.2 Baghdad in Twentieth Century

The Abbasid dynasty ended in Baghdad when Mongols (*Hulagu*) invaded Baghdad in 1258 AD, where they looted and destroyed most of the city's important buildings, burned parks and gardens, and killed thousands of people. Then, invasions and military campaigns continued in Baghdad until the first independent state of Iraq in 1921 AD. Iraqi society and culture were affected by previous policies and cultures in terms of living habits (like language, clothes, food types, and traditions), politics, architecture, and open spaces. Baghdad community was also a mix of different religions and nationalities. Hence these differences gave the city a special social-cultural composition (Abdullah, 2003). The architectural heritage and social-culture life of Baghdad consisted of; palaces, courtyard houses, *Shanashel*[1] (*Mashrabiya)*[1], *Kutab* (schools), mosques, churches, markets, cafes, *Khan*[2], baths, gates, orchards, hierarchy streets, narrow paths, bridges and gates, outdoor cinema, television, and museum.

[1]*Mashrabiya* (*Shansul*): is the Arabic term given to a type of projecting window enclosed with latticework often lined with stained glass. It is an element of traditional Arabic architecture used since Abbasid era, mostly used on the street side of the building, also be used internally on the courtyard.

[2]*Khan*: is a word of Persian origin, was refer to the place where passengers rest (a hotel).

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Urban fabric, architectural forms, and culture in Baghdad were exposed to multiple changes during the 20th century. These changes were linked with political changes, economic changes, or with social/demographic conditions that led to the continuous change of the city image (Abdullah, 2003). While mosque was one of the most important elements in old Baghdad neighborhoods. Schools were small, usually attached to the mosque, and were first emerged during the Umayyad and Abbasid eras. Baghdad community in the 20th century also showed a special attention to the *Kutab*, whereby they sequently sent their children to *Kutab* (school) to learn principles of reading and writing, Quran, mathematics and physical sports (Mohammed, 2012).

Many parks and squares were also constructed in Baghdad city during that period. Also the establishment of Parks Directorate, an institution interested in public spaces and park establishment to improve the atmosphere for people's recreation and relaxation e.g. *Najebia* Park, King Ghazi (*Umma*) Park, etc. Most of this parks were established in early fiftieth. There were also many entertainment means in *Karkh*, which people enjoy for social integration, e.g. clowns and executors of magical games, promenade along Tigris, *Eid* habits (installing simple games for children in the neighbourhoods open spaces during *Eid*), cinema (outdoor cinema), television and museum (Al-Tamimi, 2013). After the 20th revolution (late fiftieth), public parks, open spaces, and squares were developed along with growing interest in theaters and cinemas and opening of the first TV station in *Karkh* district in 1956 and Baghdadi museum in 1970 (Al-Tamimi, 2013).

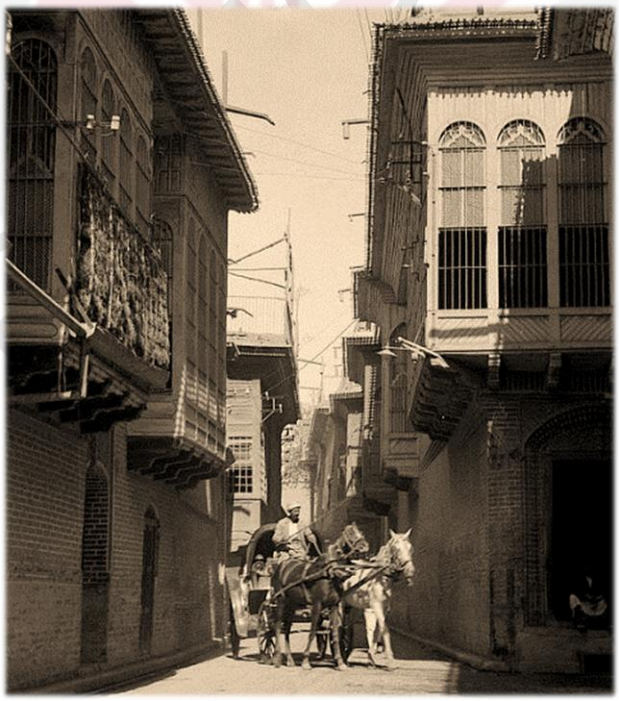

Figure 1.3: Narrow Zigzag Paths and *Shanashel,* Baghdad 1920 AD
(Source: sites.google.com)

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1.3.2.1 *Zawraa* Park, Baghdad

Zawraa Park is the largest and most important public park in Baghdad today, where it attracts many entertainment seekers since it was founded. It was established in 1971 AD with 2,450 km² as a total area but then reduced its area to construct the Unknown Soldier monument and Great Celebrations square that led to shrink its area to around 1,000 km². It is worth mentioning that *Zawraa* is the only park in Baghdad which still has some attention and care (CAUB, 2005).

Zawraa Park contains a variety of components and activities, e.g. open theaters, water bodies, lake, amusement games, zoo, castle house, planetarium, *Zawraa* tower, sculptures and monuments, different types of gardens, and seating areas. However, *Zawraa* Park suffers from poor organization and management and lack of seating areas nowadays. The planetarium also neglected and it is now closed (CAUB, 2005).

Figure 1.4: *Zawraa* Park after 2003 AD
(Source: globalresearch.ca)

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Social interaction is a global issue where new technologies, modern advances and recent issues led to distract people, overly stressed, and increasingly isolated. Although the proliferation of technologies are able to overcome the obstacles of time and space that could help to strengthen social relationships, but instead of that it causes some negative impacts on social interaction in different societies. As well as physical spaces an important factor affecting social relationships, where underutilization of public space could led to appear social interaction issues.

Similar to that, social interaction issue of Baghdad community is appearing clearly, since the war in 2003 Baghdad suffered different levels of political, administrative, economic and etc. This has also led to loss of lives, social capital, destruction of Iraqi infrastructure and important buildings, increased crisis aggravation between different ethnics and religions, which led to neglected public parks, gardens, squares, and recreational places, closing of theaters cinemas. This substantially lowered the quality of life, destroyed social interaction and led to failure in providing essential services. So Baghdad citizens look for alternatives in entertainment, amenities, relaxation and social interaction e.g. travelling or migration to different cities and countries, social media or emergence of some inappropriate sociocultural behaviours.

So the main problems identified in this study were lack of amenities and open spaces with insecurity in Baghdad city which led to discouragement of social interaction among residents. So this study aimed to enhance and find the appropriate structure to achieve social interaction, emphasize the role of social interaction in support community by achieving social-recreational spaces for a sound social interaction in Baghdad.

1.5 Research Questions

Research questions developed according to the literature studies (fig. 2-11, in chapter 2) and in relation to research problem, the main research question (main RQ) is as follows;

I. What are the means to achieve social interaction at community park in *Karkh*, Baghdad?

There are some sub-research questions (sub-RQ1 and sub-RQ2) derived from the main research question and developed according to the literature studies, are as follows:

II. What are the criteria of creating social interaction in a recreation open space in *Karkh*, Baghdad?

III. What factors are affecting social interaction of *Karkh* community in Baghdad?

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1.6 Research Objectives

Based on the research question and problem statement, the objectives of this study are;

I. To identify the means to promote social interaction at community park in *Karkh*, Baghdad.

II. To determine the criteria of a recreational open space, to promote social interaction in *Karkh*, Baghdad.

III. To understand the factors affecting social interaction of *Karkh* community in Baghdad.

1.7 Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis for the study was developed after a rigorous literature study (details in chapter 2). Sound social interaction in a residential area depends on presence of a suitable physical environment, provide appropriate activities to promote social interaction among residents. Successful social interactions among residents require an appropriate secured space that could support daily activities and needs. Open spaces should provide different facilities and enhance physical, social, mental and environmental components for citizens and city. Open spaces also become useful by applying proper size, scale, structure, design and accessibility. Therefore the study believes that;

"Achieving a community park is essential to enhance physical, health, mental, social, environmental, and aesthetic aspects for residents and residential area, thereby encouraging social interactions in the city between citizens by implementing appropriate social and recreational activities in park".

1.8 Research Structure

This study employed a quantitative approach (survey) as the main methodology, and depends on recommendation (Creswell, 2013) to design the research framework. Creswell recommended to present a research design process in a series of steps so that the reader can see how one step leads to another for a complete discussion of the data collection and analysis procedures in quantitative researches. That was based on the nature of research problem or issue being addressed, research questions with hypothesis and the audiences for the study (fig. 1.5). This study is organized in five chapters; chapter 1 mentions the social interaction issue globally, it also introduces the Baghdad history in terms of social-cultural life and city urban structure, so as to provide a simplified picture of present and past Baghdad, therefore helps to understand the dimensions of problem, when comparing the city's status between past and present. This chapter also precisely explains the problem statement, research questions, research objectives, research framework and study limits.

Chapter 2 covers literature review based on books, articles and previous researches in both English and Arabic. This chapter is divided to four parts and includes a relationship

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between the four parts with a critical analysis and relevant literature used in this research. Chapter 3 relates to research methodology used. It includes research design, study area, and data collection instrument, variables, validity, and instrumentation reliability. Chapter 4 discusses results and data analysis of the study according to (Creswell's 2013) recommendations for quantitative data analysis, using SPSS version 23. This chapter also includes tables, figures, and graphs of findings. Chapter 5 includes findings discussion, summary, conclusion, contribution acknowledgement, and recommendations for future researches.

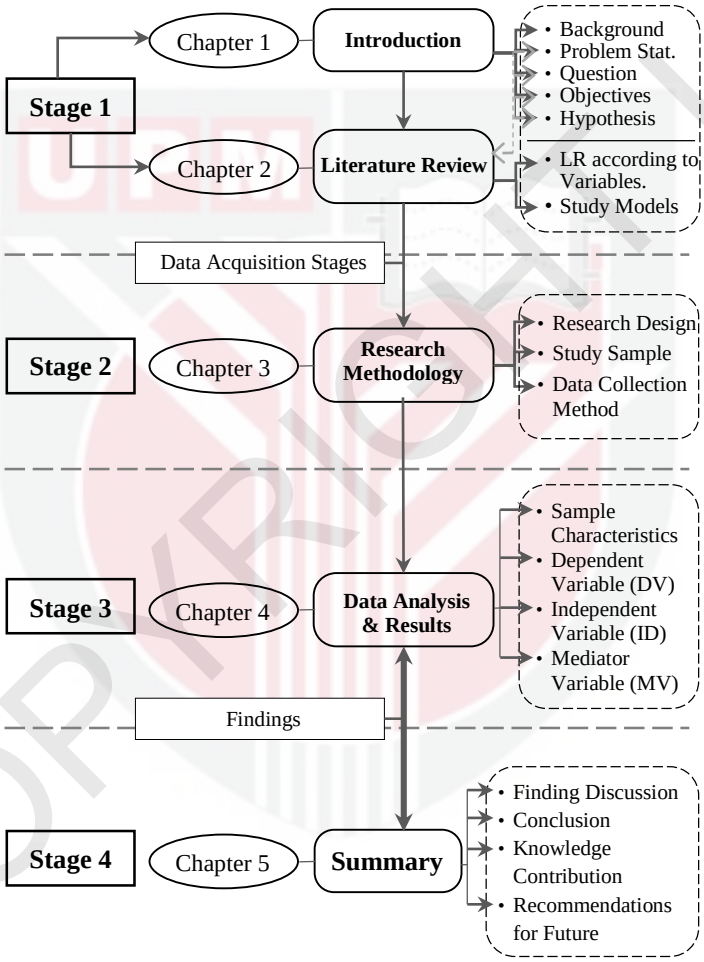

Figure 1.5: Research Structure
(Source: Authors, 2016)

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1.9 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focused only on social interaction in open spaces in *Karkh* district, Baghdad, especially on factors affecting social interaction in the *Karkh* community. It does not cover social interaction in general. The study employed a cross-section survey in terms of questionnaires. The findings of this study basically depended on the integrity and honesty of respondents' answers and the descriptive statistics and frequency as the main method of data analysis for each variable separately according to recommendations of Creswell.

There are difficulties in data collection process, where general security situation in Baghdad was unstable. So it was difficult to find suitable respondents number according to individual respondent characteristics. Also it was difficult to get accurate sample characteristics information from the survey due to security issue.

1.10 Summary

This chapter contains a general overview of thesis process. It discusses social interaction global issue, history of social entertainment and open spaces since the Baghdad foundation until today. This chapter also highlighted the causes and problems that led to research proposal, and mention its research questions, aims, hypothesis and framework. The structure of this research will organize in five chapters, which are the introduction, literature review, research methodology, analysis, discussion, results and conclusion.

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